TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM FOR: HENRY A. KISSINGER

FROM: AL HAIG

SUBJECT: Sortie Levels in Southeast Asia

Attached is Admiral Moorer's report on his review of sortie levels in Southeast Asia. The graphs at Tabs A and B confirm that the overall sortie level has been dropping since May with the major decrease occurring in levels for South Vietnam. Admiral Moorer states that the maximum effort was exerted during the initial phases of the North Vietnamese invasion when large numbers of sorties were concentrated in South Vietnam. As the battlefield situation stabilized, units returned to optimum scheduling for sustained operations. Subsequently, the total sortie level has been affected by adverse weather which continues to hamper operations, particularly in the North.

Admiral Moorer notes three factors have significally affected overall sortie levels:

-- During the initial surge period more sorties per aircraft were generated. The increase in air assets made it more difficult to turn aircraft around quickly and placed a strain on the logistics system.

-- When the maximum effort was in South Vietnam flight distances were shorter and fewer support aircraft were necessary compared with flights against North Vietnam.

-- From May to September the number of operating days per month dropped from approximately 20 to 15 because of weather conditions. Weather over North Vietnam will continue to deteriorate to a low of approximately 9 flying days in December. (The first three months of 1973 are even worse.)

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

JTH:sfp:10/3/72

The memo at Tab C contains a list of key factors adversely affecting sortie rate. Of interest is the report that:

-- there have been delays in replacement of the 120 aircraft lost and that two carriers have been off the line for ship repairs (it appears that the normal practice is to keep 4 of the 6 carriers actually on the flight line. The number of deployed fixed wing aircraft has dropped by 80 from a high of 1567 in July.

-- relocation of six squadrons from Da Nang to Thailand caused reduced sortie generation due to increased distance and additional refueling requirements.

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

CM-2217-72
30 September 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER, ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT
FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

Subj: Sortie Levels (U)

1. I have reviewed the sortie levels in Southeast Asia which have shown a slight but relatively steady decline since May 1972. This trend is due to a combination of factors, including surge capability, weather, relocation of forces, and increased effort in the Northern Route Packages. (TAB A)

2. Immediately following the North Vietnamese offensive, all air units were used to meet the crisis by surging to the maximum extent possible. As forces arrived from CONUS, base loadings increased with a resulting decrease in the flexibility inherent to each base. Ramp space was not available for quick turn-arounds with the net result that fewer sorties per aircraft could be generated. Similarly, overloading caused problems in munitions storage and delivery, availability of repair facilities, and pressure on the entire logistics system.

3. As you know, weather plays an important role in air operations. There is a strong correlation between the reduction in good weather days and the overall sortie trend line (TAB B). From May to September, the number of operating days per month dropped from approximately 20 to 15. Heavy rain, low ceilings, and strong winds associated with the monsoon caused delays, diversions, and cancellations.

4. As the military situation in South Vietnam changed, sortie requirements in specific areas such as An Loc began to decrease. This enabled increased activity over North Vietnam. The attendant change from small flights operating in response to the local tactical situation to large, augmented strike forces caused sortie generation to become more complex. This required some tradeoff in total capability.

5. From the foregoing, it can be seen that maximum effort

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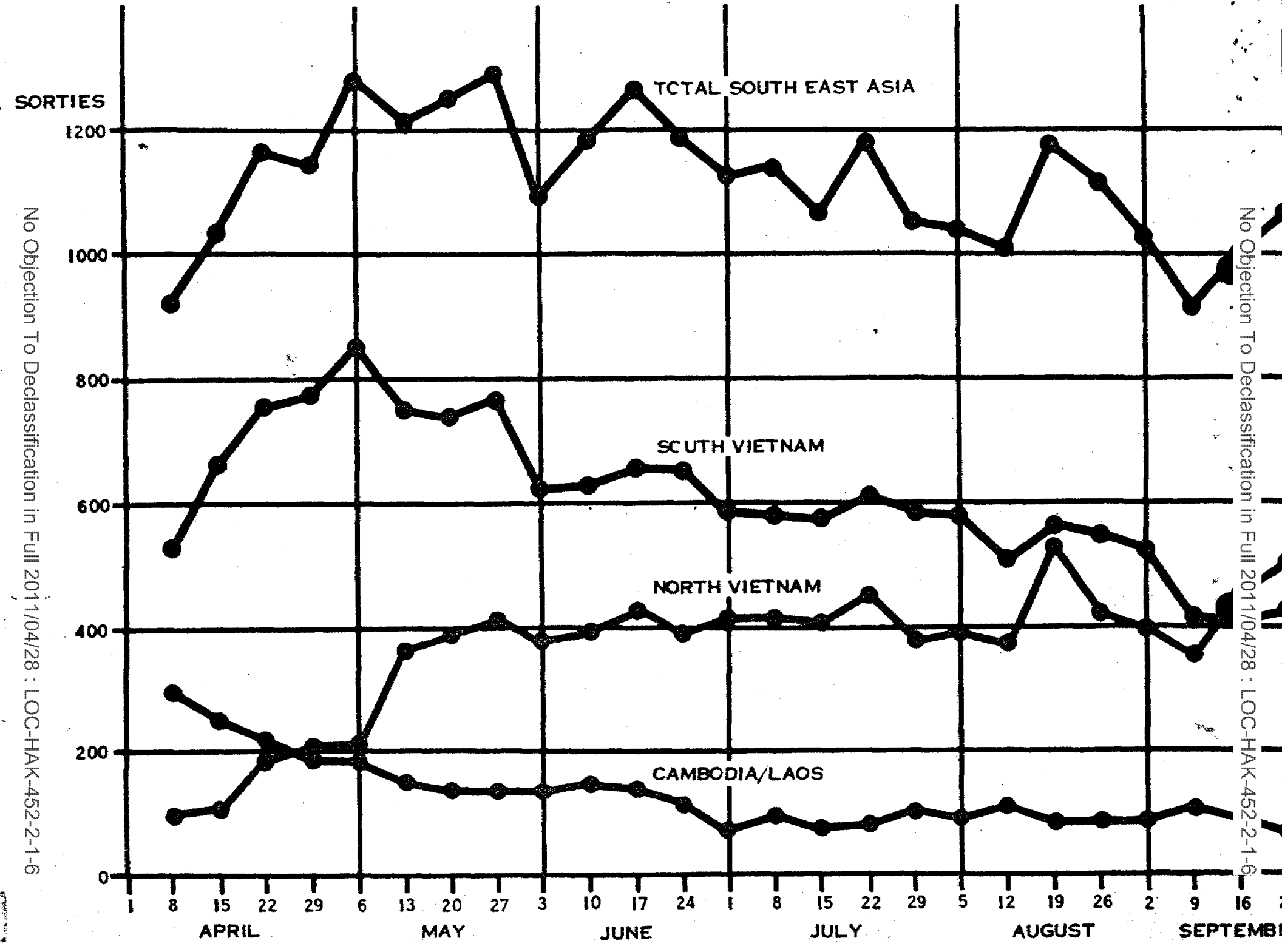
was exerted during the initial phases of the North Vietnamese invasion. Large numbers of sorties were concentrated in South Vietnam, utilizing rapid turn-arounds and increased deployments from CONUS. As the battlefield situation stabilized, units returned to optimum scheduling for sustained operations. Subsequently, the total sortie level began to be affected by weather which continues to hamper our operations particularly in the North. This can be expected to further reduce sortie levels as the number of operational days for North Vietnam continues to drop to a low of approximately 9 in December.

T. H. Moorer

T. H. MOORER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

Attachments
a/s

DAILY AVERAGE U.S. FIXED WING SORTIE RATE



No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/28 : LOC-HAK-452-2-1-6

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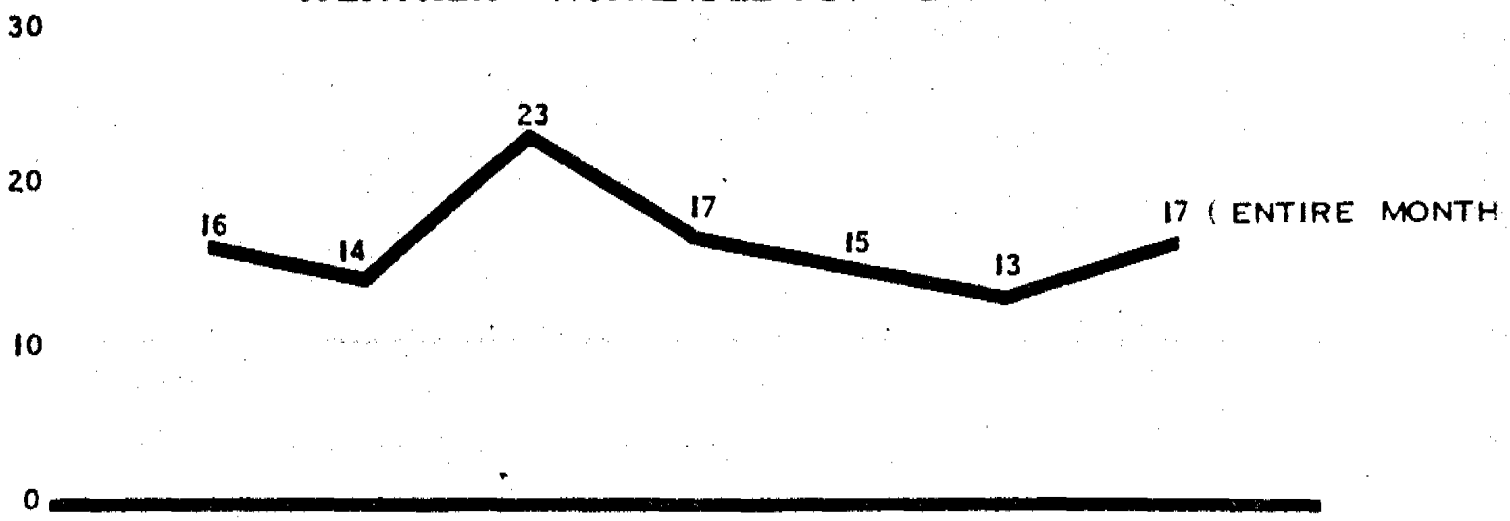
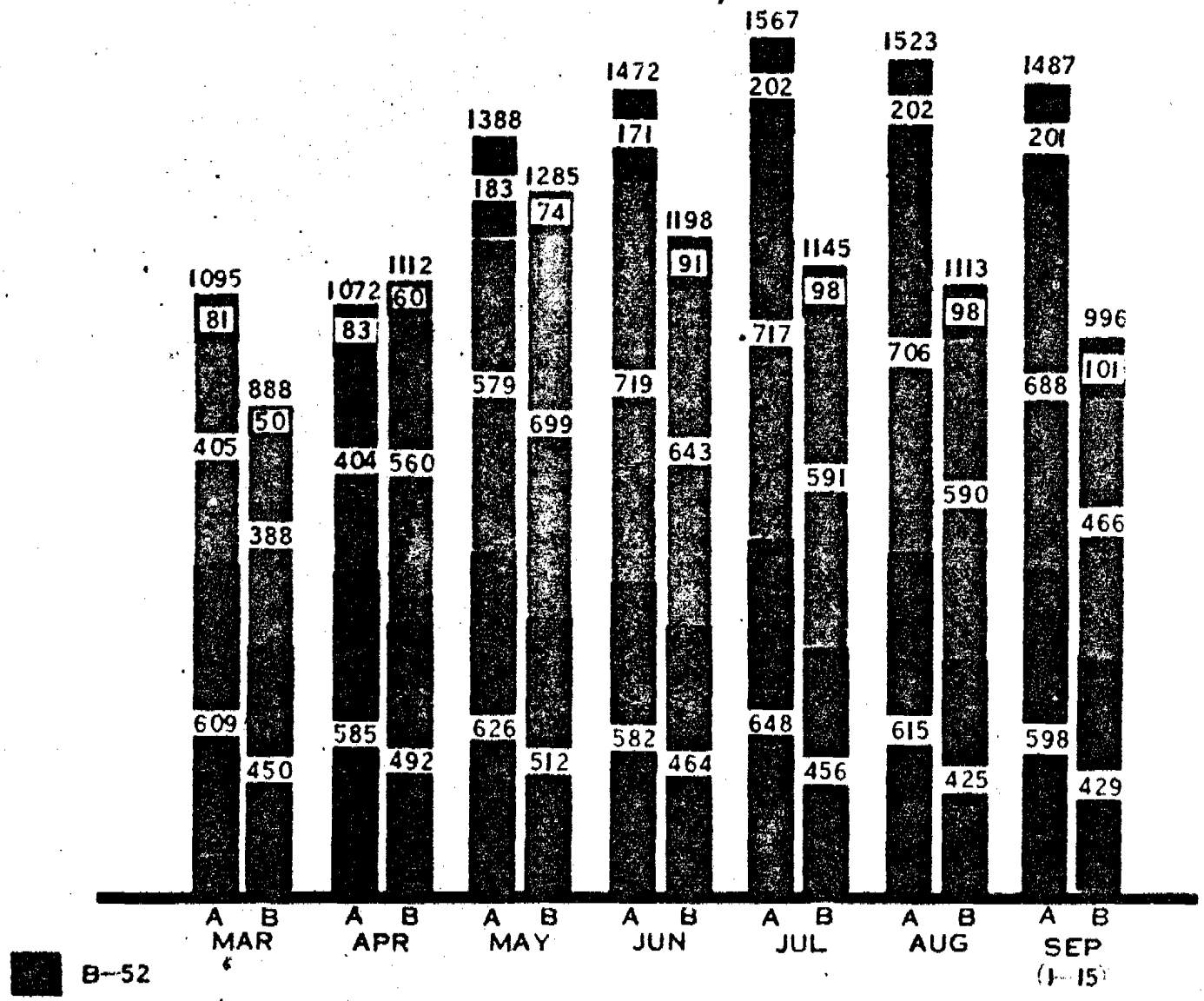
SOUTHEAST ASIA

WEATHER - AVAILABLE FLYING DAYS



DEPLOYED FIXED WING AIRCRAFT/AVERAGE DAILY SORTIES



B-52

COMBAT

C/SPT

COLUMN A -- DEPLOYED AIRCRAFT

COLUMN B -- AVERAGE DAILY SORTIES

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Key Factors Adversely Affecting Sortie Rate

I Weather

- Launch base weather for AF squadrons causes delays and cancellations
- Air Refueling Area and enroute weather causes cancellation of sorties
- Target weather causes cancellation of planned strikes
- Five typhoons--Degraded weather throughout SEAsia--Required evacuation of CVAs from normal operating location on two occasions

II Redeployments

- Three USAF and 3 USMC squadrons relocated from Danang to Thailand bases caused reduced sortie generation due to--Increased distance from target--Additional air refueling requirements

III Force Employment

- Decrease in sortie requirement in SVN, Laos, and Cambodia after An Loc and Kontum
- Emphasis shifted to northern RPs resulted in--longer sorties--more support sorties per ordnance dropping sortie
- Using B-52s in MR-1 requires more support sorties--reduces A/C available for attack sorties

IV Aircraft Availability

- Loss of 120 A/C with delays in replacement
- Two CVAs off line for ship repairs reduced aircraft available
- Crowded conditions at Thailand bases created maintenance problems and reduced operating flexibility

V Effectiveness

- Guided bombs require fewer attack A/C to get desired results
- F-111 replacement of F-4 will tend to decrease sorties but increase effectiveness particularly in poor weather